

Corps Releases Coastal Louisiana Ecosystem Restoration Study For Public Review

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has released for public review and comments its final report and programmatic environmental impact statement on the Louisiana Coastal Area (LCA) Ecosystem Restoration Study.

After the comment period ends on December 6, the Chief of Engineers report will be completed and provided to the Secretary of the Army for review and submission to Congress. The Corps expects to recommend that the Congress approve the Coastal Louisiana Restoration Plan and provide conditional authorization for the near term critical restoration features.

These authorizations will allow the Corps to initiate the restoration of this nationally significant ecosystem.

"We have taken the lessons and experience from past restoration and research efforts to prepare a systematic approach to address the critical needs facing coastal Louisiana. We have developed a solid scientific and cost-effective basis for each of our recommendations," Major General Don T. Riley, the Corps' Director of Civil Works, said. "This has been done through the collaboration and collective expertise of the team from the Corps, other Federal resource agencies, the state, and the scientific, engineering and environmental communities."

Strategies under consideration for restoring the ecosystem include:

- Freshwater and sediment re-introductions by diverting some Mississippi River flows into hydrologic basins;
- Barrier island restoration through placement of sand from offshore sources or the Mississippi River to sustain key geomorphic structures. This would help protect the ecology of estuarine bays and marshes by reducing gulf influences as well as protect nationally important water bird nesting areas;
- Hydrologic modifications to help restore salinity and marsh inundation patterns and provide fishery access in previously unavailable habitats; and
- Creating a marsh platform for habitat in areas near existing navigation channels through the beneficial use of maintenance dredging material.

The LCA ecosystem restoration plan contains seven components:

- Five Near-Term Critical Restoration Features that have significant engineering efforts already underway;
- Ten Near-Term Critical Restoration Features recommended for study and future congressional authorization;

- Science and Technology Program to reduce scientific and technological uncertainties and optimize attainment of LCA Program restoration objectives;
- Science and Technology Program Demonstration Projects to resolve critical areas of scientific, technical, or engineering uncertainty while providing meaningful restoration benefits whenever possible;
- Programmatic Authorization for the Beneficial Use of Dredged Material to restore, protect, and create aquatic and wetland habitats in connection with construction or maintenance dredging of an authorized project;
- Programmatic Authorization for Investigations of Modifications of Existing Structures and/or their operation management plans to improve environmental performance; and
- Large-Scale and Long-Term Concepts Requiring Detailed Study to determine their potential for achieving restoration objectives beyond the critical needs, near-term focus of other LCA Plan components.

The total first cost of the plan is \$1.9 billion. The federal share is estimated at \$1.28 billion and the non-federal share is estimated at \$712 million. The Louisiana Department of Natural Resources will be the non-federal cost-sharing sponsor.

Letters of comment (faxes and emails will not be accepted) on the study report should be mailed with postmark no later than December 6, 2004, to the attention of Mr. Tim Axtman; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Planning, Programs, and Project Management Division; Coastal Restoration Branch; CEMVN-PM-C; P.O. Box 60267; New Orleans, Louisiana 70160 0267. Mr. Axtman may be contacted at (504) 862-1921 if questions arise. Requests for a copy of the final Study Main Report should be made to Mr. Axtman.

Letters of comment (faxes and emails will not be accepted) on the FPEIS should be mailed with postmark no later than December 6, 2004, to the attention of Dr. William P. Klein; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Planning, Programs, and Project Management Division; Environmental Planning and Compliance Branch; CEMVN-PM-RS; P.O. Box 60267; New Orleans, Louisiana 70160 0267. Dr. Klein may be contacted at (504) 862-2540 if questions arise. Requests for a copy of the FPEIS should be made to Dr. Klein.

Additional information on the LCA Study is available at www.lca.gov.